A RIVER DIVIDED

THE FISHING CULTURES OF THE KERN RIVER

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
For the degree of Master of Arts in Geography

By

Anthony Harju

May 2012
The thesis of Anthony Harju is approved:

__________________________________________  ______________________
Dr. James Craine                                Date

__________________________________________  ______________________
Dr. Yifei Sun                                   Date

__________________________________________  ______________________
Dr. Ron Davidson, Chair                         Date

California State University, Northridge
Preface

I have been fishing for as long as I can remember. Growing up I fished anywhere and everywhere we went with whatever equipment I could get my hands on. Then one day about three years ago the way I fished would change forever. While on a camping trip at the Kern River, my buddies and I woke up to fish boiling all over the river it was obvious they were eating the little bugs that were on top of the water. As fate would have it, one of my buddies just happened to have his uncle’s fly fishing gear in the truck and since the lures I was using were not working, I decided to give the fly pole a shot. I had seen it done in the movies and on television and thought how hard could it be. Even though I did not even get a single bite that morning I found a method of fishing that would change my life and ultimately lead to this research project. The more I went up to the Kern River to fly fish I began to notice fly fishermen were different from the other fishermen. They held themselves to a different set of standards; they were a group within the group. Since that day at the Kern River I have spent countless hours fly fishing and have fly fished in almost every state in the western United States. Through these ventures I noticed that the Kern River is unique in the sense that the fly fishermen there are a more tightly knit group than any other place I have been. As a graduate student in the geography department I could not help but think of geographic reasons why the Kern River fly fishermen were different than other fly fishermen across the United States.
# Table of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Signature Page</td>
<td>ii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preface</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>vi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Background</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Kern River</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fly Fishing</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Questions and Hypothesis</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literature Review</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difference between Fly Fishing and Spin Fishing</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spirituality and Fly Fishing</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culture</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subculture</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subculture Creation</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Results</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Section</td>
<td>Page</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subculture</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spirituality and Fly Fishing</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environment</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>References</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix A: Lower Kern River Map</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix B: Upper Kern River Map</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ABSTRACT

A RIVER DIVIDED

THE FISHING CULTURES OF THE KERN RIVER

By

Anthony Harju

Master of Arts in Geography

The Kern River gets thousands of recreation seekers every year, many of them fishermen in search of the elusive Kern River rainbow trout. The geography of the Kern River makes it the southernmost river of the Sierra Nevada Mountains and the southernmost river where an angler has the opportunity to catch a trout of 20-plus inches. There are two distinct styles of fishing; there is spin fishing and fly fishing. By simply observing the two types of fishing one will be able to pick up the obvious differences. However, as one begins to look deeper into each of the techniques as it is argued here one will begin to see there are two distinct cultures of fishermen at the Kern River. By using upwards of 15 semi-structured interviews of randomly chosen fishermen at the Kern River the thesis shows there is evidence enough to distinguish the fly fishermen at the Kern River as a distinct subculture.
Introduction

For those who are not familiar with the sport of fishing there are basically two types of fishing: fly fishing and spin fishing. The first glaring difference between the two is in the equipment used. However, upon closer observation one will be able to pick up other differences between the two styles of fishing. A fly fishing rod is usually made of graphite and can be anywhere from six feet to fifteen feet in length (Bean 1996). Spinning rods are also made of graphite and the lengths are about the same. Spinning rods are found in much shorter lengths than fly rods. The eyelets on the rods are another distinguishing trait. This is mainly because of the different types of lines used in each technique. Since the line used in each technique is different so are the reels. A fly reel is designed to hold fly line and backing. Backing attaches the fly line to the reel and fly line is a thick looking line that is coated in plastic and is either made for sinking or floating (Bean 1996). Regular or spin fishing line is the clear monofilament stuff most people are familiar with. Fly line is much heavier than regular fishing line. The reason fly line is so much heavier is because the lure or fly used is very light in weight, without the weight of the fly line; the angler would not be able to cast the fly very far at all. Spin fishermen use heavier lures and often times weights in order to cast their choice of bait to their area of choice. The combination of the rod, reel, and line used make the angler cast using certain methods, and casting methods is another distinguishing feature between the two fishing techniques.

Most spin fishermen will cast using some sort of overhead throwing motion. Spin fishermen flip the bail while holding the line then lift the rod over their shoulder so it is now behind them and then flings the rod using a throwing motion toward the desired
Fly fishermen cast much differently. The most common method most people have at least seen is the false cast. False casting is where the fishermen continuously make a casting motion without letting the fly or the fly line touch the water. This method is used to let line out while at the same time drying the fly and the line (Bean 1996). The flip method is another technique used to cast while fly fishing. In the flip technique the fishermen will let the current take their line and fly down river. Once the anglers are happy with the amount of line let out they will simply flip the line up stream so the fly can drift down again.

The last major difference can be seen in comparing the fly to the lure or bait. Lures are usually made out of metal or some sort of plastic. However, for trout fishing at the Kern River most spin fishermen will use some sort of flashing spinner which is made out of metal or they will use bait. The most common choices of bait are worms and power bait. The worms are usually night crawlers and the power bait comes in a variety of colors.

Flies, on the other hand, can be made from all sorts of things including elk hair, deer hair, many different types of bird feathers, muskrat undercoat, and other materials. For example an Adams dry fly is made of gray and black thread, hen hackle, hackle fibers, muskrat under fur, and rooster neck feathers (O’Reilly 2005). The earliest reference to fly tying material comes from Aelian’s Natural History where flies were being tied by wrapping red wool around a hook to mimic the bugs on the water (Herd 2005). The equipment is only one difference between fly fishermen and spin fishermen at the Kern River.
A walk along the shoreline of the river and one is able to observe the different techniques used by the different types of fishermen. Spin fishermen are generally on the shore line either standing or sitting in a lawn chair. If the spin fishermen are using a lure they will cast and then reel the lure in over and over. If the spin fishermen are using bait they will cast it out and then sit and wait for a fish to come along and take the bait. On the other hand, one will see most fly fishermen wading in the river often hiding behind a rock or log so they do not disturb the fish. The fly fishermen will cast up river and let their fly drift down the current in hopes of a bite. Fly fishermen will methodically make their way up river moving cautiously so they do not spook the fish. It does not take long for one to notice that fly fishermen are a different breed when compared to spin fishermen.

This thesis will argue that fly fishermen at the Kern River form a distinct subculture. The two aspects that will be discussed in making this argument are: environmental impact and spiritualism. After giving a brief overview of these aspects, I will discuss the literature on subcultures in order to develop a theory on why we may consider the fly fishermen at the Kern River a subculture. In becoming a fly fisherman, one begins to realize other differences that the average person would not be able to see right away. Fly fishermen seem to be much less harmful to the local environment. It is rather difficult to find any remaining signs of fly fishermen left along the shore of the river. However, one will find it rather easy to find remains where spin fishermen have been fishing. Spin fishermen often leave empty bait containers, fishing line, and all sorts of other trash along the river. Not only is there a difference in the amount of trash, but spin fishermen are much more likely to kill the fish they catch than are the fly fishermen.
Flies are tied using single hooks that are often barbless while bait and lure hooks are treble hooks, treble hooks are almost never barbless and have three different hooks. When bait fishing the fish almost always swallows the bait as well as the hook and in most cases the fish dies even if the angler tries to release it. When using a fly the fish is almost always hooked in the lip which allows the fish to be released unharmed.

Another difference between the two methods is the spiritual or religious aspect of fly fishing. There is a lot of literature that has been written about the religious or spiritual aspect of fly fishing. Most of those who have tried both techniques have found fly fishing to be a positive spiritual experience. One major reason for this is fly fishermen have to be more aware of how nature works in order to be successful. Fly fishermen must become experts on insects, they must learn what types of insects live in the area and at what time of the year these insects are present. Fly fishermen also have to learn the lifecycle of each insect and where these insects are at each phase of their life. Fly fishermen are also poised in the water trying to blend in with their surroundings. All of this phenagling going on while trying to get the fly to drift down the current of the river as naturally as possible. Spin fishermen on the other hand, go to the store and buy bait and often never even know what the bait is made out of.

There are articles out there on fly fishing subcultures; one will find most of these articles focus on subcultures comprised of fly fishermen who fish for the same species of fish. A perfect example is the steelhead subculture. Steelhead are a species of trout that can live in both fresh water and salt water (Bentler 2008). Steel head spawn every year by swimming up rivers from the ocean to lay their eggs (Bentler 2008). There are also
articles and websites that refer to cut throat, bass, and carp fly fishing subcultures. Again these subcultures are being defined by the specific type of fish each of them fish for.

Some articles refer to fly fishing subcultures that are based on the area they fish, but none focus on Kern River fly fisherman. One article focuses on a fly fishing subculture in Vermont (Mulready 2011). The Yakima River in Eastern Washington has been written about as having a fly fishing subculture (Probasco 2011). There was a dissertation done at the University of Arkansas on consumer subculture that focused on fly fisherman (Huggins 2008). Studying the fly fisherman of the Kern River is in part important because of consumerism. The town of Kernville and surrounding areas could greatly benefit from understanding the subculture of fly fishermen. Businesses will be able to cater to fly fisherman on another level after having gained a better understanding of the group. Since many of the businesses in Kernville rely on fisherman to keep their doors open, this research could be invaluable.
Background

People fish for almost every species of fish using many different techniques. It is important to set some boundaries for the following research. It should be made clear that the topic of this research project is on fishing the Kern River for trout. Fly fishing is a technique that can be used to catch all species of fish in all different types of water bodies. However, the focus here is specifically on the fishermen of the Kern River and the different techniques and cultures of trout fishing. The Kern River was chosen for this research specifically because of its geographic location. In California the Kern is the Southernmost River with a large trout population, this brings people from all over California to the Kern River each year.

The Kern River

The Kern River starts high in the sierra Nevada mountains west of Mount Whitney and it flows about 165 miles southwest to drain into Bakersfield. At one time the Kern River was twenty miles longer and flowed into what is now Buena Vista Lake. The Kern River is the only major River in the Sierras to flow in a southerly direction; it is also the southernmost river of the sierras. The Kern River has many tributaries, the largest being the south fork which comes together with the main or north fork at Lake Isabella. The North fork flows through canyons that create scenic views which make it a popular whitewater rafting, fishing, and camping destination. The Kern River is generally broken down into three sections the forks, the upper, and the lower. The section known as “the forks” includes the headwaters down to Johnsondale. The upper kern is a twenty mile section from Johnsondale down to Kernville; this section is arguably the most popular fishing and rafting section of the kern. The lower kern starts below the lake Isabella dam and continues down the canyon into Bakersfield.
The Kern River like most of North America was not always as it is today; Native Americans were here long before the white man. It is believed the Tubatulabal and the Kawaiisu tribes who are closely related to the Shoshone Indians populated the Kern River valley around 1000 B.C. (krvhistoricalsociety.org). Evidence of these people can still be seen today in the form of petro glyphs and grinding holes in many of the rocks. The first documented non-native American traveler to enter the Kern River valley was Captain Joseph Reddeford Walker in 1834 (Southern Sierra, 2012). Walker entered from the east along the south fork in search of the northern most pass into the sierra that was relatively snow free, the pass he came over is now named walker pass at 5,200 feet elevation. Capt. Walker led many parties through the Kern valley one which included artist Edward M. Kern for whom the river, Kern County, and the town of Kernville are all named after (Southern Sierra 2012). In 1848 gold was discovered in the sierra and many gold seekers traveled north through the Kern Valley in search of a fortune. Gold was also discovered in the Kern Valley and the town of what is now Lake Isabella became an instant mining town. As the gold rush dwindled ranching became popular in the area and it is the ranchers who are credited with establishing homesteads, schools, and churches in the area (Southern Sierra 2012). In the early 1900’s the Kern River began being harnessed for its hydroelectric power. Workers from the hydroelectric project began flooding the small towns of the Kern River leading to the building of a road that was completed in 1926 and is now highway 178 (KRV Historical Society 2012). Today however, the Kern River relies on recreation and adventure seekers to sustain the economy and fishing is one of the most popular activities on the river.
Rainbow trout are the most sought out fish on the Kern and can be found in all three sections. “The forks” of the Kern and its tributaries are also home to brown trout and golden trout. In fact, the Kern and its tributaries are the only place golden trout, which is California’s state fish, are native to. Also native to the Kern is the Kern River rainbow trout which has been the topic of much debate among fly fishermen. In 1928 the Kern River fish hatchery was built and started stocking the Kern River and other local waters with rainbow trout. Stocking of the river is a highly debated topic to say the least. Advocates believe that the more fish in the river the more fishermen will catch fish, and thus the more people will visit the river which boosts business. Advocates also believe that the Kern River will be fished out without stocking efforts (Walters 1997).

Opponents of stocking the river, many of whom are fly fishermen, point out that the native species in the river are adversely affected. By stocking the river with non-native species of trout the native species have been almost completely eliminated because of interbreeding (Walters 1997). Opponents also believe that by strictly enforcing fishing regulations the fish population will not be diminished. Opponents of stocking the river along with the Kern fly fishermen are clearly the minority in the debate.

Fly Fishing

It is safe to say that humans have been fishing for close to if not their entire history. The first documentation of fly fishing comes around AD 200 by a Roman named Claudius Aelianus (Wilson 1997). In his book Claudius Aelianus refers to Macedonian’s fishing with cock feathers tied around a hook to catch fish:

they have planned a snare for the fish, and get the better of them by their fisherman's craft. . . They fasten red wool. . . round a hook, and fit on to the wool two feathers which grow under a cock's wattles, and which in color are like wax. Their rod is six feet
long, and their line is the same length. Then they throw their snare, and the fish, attracted and maddened by the color, comes straight at it, thinking from the pretty sight to gain a dainty mouthful; when, however, it opens its jaws, it is caught by the hook, and enjoys a bitter repast, a captive (Wilson 1997).

The first book written about fly fishing was *A Treatyse of Fysshynge wyth an Angle* published in 1496 written by Dame Juliana Berners. The book included detailed tips on how to make flies, rods, fly line, and fishing destinations (Berners 1496). Interestingly, Dame Juliana Berners was a woman. Along with being a woman of keen intellect she was an accomplished outdoorswoman and a devotee to both hunting and angling (*Encyclopedia Britannica Online*, 2012). Not much is known about her life other than that she was a noblewoman and a prioress of the Sopwell Nunnery near St. Albans, England (ibid). Then in 1653 came Sir Isaac Walton’s book *The Complete Angler*, a book that includes chapters on fly fishing. It is at this point in history that it becomes clear fly fishing is a commonly used technique in Europe. According to literature at the time by the end of the 15th century fly fishing was practiced as a sport by the English upper classes.

Documented fly fishing in North America began in the mid 18th century. The earliest documents describing fly fishing for trout in North America come from the diary of Joseph Banks in 1766 (Schullery, 1987). One can safely assume Native Americans were practicing some form of fly fishing long before the Europeans ever arrived, although it is difficult to prove this with because of the lack of Native American written history before the time of European arrival. However, William Bartram’s book *Travels* mentions a method he observed the Seminole Indians using called the “bob” which is an
early form of fly fishing (Tapply 2007). The “bob” method used a hook covered with feathers and deer hair being moved along the surface of the water (Tapply 2007).
Research Questions and Hypotheses

The purpose of this paper is to gain a better understanding of the fishing culture at the Kern River. The first research question I am interested in answering is whether or not a fly fishing subculture exists on the Kern River. In all of the literature reviewed, there is absolutely no literature on a subculture of fly fishermen on the Kern River. The first step in determining if there is a true subculture is to define the term subculture itself. There seems to be an infinite number of dictionary definitions of subculture. The definition used for this paper comes from the cultural dictionary. “A group within a society that has its own shared set of customs, attitudes, and values often accompanied by jargon or slang. A subculture can be organized around a common activity, occupation, age, status, ethnic background, race, religion or any other unifying social condition” (New Dictionary of Cultural Literacy, 2002). Subcultures find pleasure in being distinct from the main culture (Finchem 2007).

I hypothesize there is a true subculture of fly fishermen at the Kern River. I hypothesize a true subculture of fly fishermen exist because of the previously stated differences between fly fishermen and spin fishermen. After having spent countless hours over the past few years on the Kern River as a fly fisherman I have become part of what I feel is a true subculture. By using interviews and ethnographic observation, the intention is to obtain data that will prove whether or not a true subculture exists on the Kern River. Both the ethnographic observation and the interviews will be conducted on spin fishermen and fly fishermen.

The second research question is, whether or not fly fishermen are perceived as more environmentally-friendly than spin fishermen. Studies on this topic are surprisingly
very rare. However, simply walking the shoreline of the Kern River one will surely find trash left behind by those who use the river as a recreation area. The trash along the shoreline includes things such as beer cans, toilet paper, food wrappers, and fishing supply containers. Using semi-structured interviews it is expected the results will show that the majority of people familiar with the Kern River will perceive fly fishermen as less harmful to the environment than spin fishermen. Mainly because it is much less common to find any trash that can be identified as left by a fly fishermen.

The third and final research question is whether or not fly fishing is more spiritual than spin fishing. There is plenty of literature and even some cinema on the spiritual aspect of fly fishing. One rather famous movie that touches on this topic is *A River Runs Through It* starring Brad Pitt. The film is set in Montana along the Blackfoot River and is a story of a family’s life and struggles. Fly fishing brings the men of the family together and offers them comfort in difficult times much like church does for a religious person. Along with the movie there is a lot of literature on the topic of the spirituality of fly fishing. In fact the third most printed text in the English language is *the Complete Angler: or the Contemplative Mans Recreation* by Sir Izaak Walton (Snyder 2007). There are also plenty of articles to choose from when reviewing the literature already in print.
Literature Review

One of the first steps taken for this research project was to review the relevant literature. In all of the background reading done for this project no literature was found specifically on the topic of the fishing culture(s) of the Kern River. Since there is not any existing literature on the fishing cultures of the Kern River the topic was then narrowed down into different sections on which literature does exist including fishing techniques, spirituality and fly fishing, as well as culture and subculture. The first section is on the differences between fly fishing and bait fishing. Section two is on the spirituality of fly fishing, and the last section is on culture itself. The section on culture also includes a sub section about subculture and conducting ethnographic research.

Differences Between Fly Fishing and Spin Fishing

To non-fishermen, the difference between fly fishing and spin fishing may seem trivial. However, there are significant differences between them and, as will be argued below, they define two contrasting subcultures. This literature review will first differentiate the two types of fishing. It will then elaborate on fly fishing by exploring it as a “spiritual” activity, where as spin fishing is more of a casual pastime. Finally, it will argue that these two types of fishing define two different (sub) cultures. The first glaring difference between fly fishing and spin fishing is the different equipment used for each technique. The difference in the rods and reels is a good place to start. A fly fishing rod is usually made of graphite and can be anywhere from six feet to fifteen feet in length (Bean 1996). Spinning rods are also made of graphite and the lengths are about the same. Spinning rods are found in much shorter lengths than fly rods. The eyelets on the rods are another distinguishing trait. This is mainly because of the different types of lines
used in each technique. Since the line used in each technique is different so are the reels. A fly reel is designed to hold fly line and backing. Backing attaches the fly line to the reel and fly line is a thick looking line that is coated in plastic and is either made for sinking or floating (Bean 1996). Regular or spin fishing line is the clear monofilament stuff most people are familiar with.

Fly line is much heavier than regular fishing line. The reason fly line is so much heavier is because the lure or fly used is very light in weight, without the weight of the fly line; the angler would not be able to cast the fly very far at all. Spin fishermen use heavier lures and often times weights in order to cast their choice of bait to their area of choice. The combination of the rod, reel, and line used is one of the first noticeable differences between the two methods of fishing. These are also the first visible cues of two cultures differentiating themselves from one another. Another visible difference between the two methods of fishing is the casting techniques used by each group.

Most spin fishermen will cast using some sort of overhead throwing motion. Spin fishermen flip the bail while holding the line then lift the rod over their shoulder so it is now behind them and then flings the rod using a throwing motion toward the desired target. Fly fishermen cast much differently. The most common method most people have at least seen is the false cast. False casting is where the fishermen continuously make a casting motion without letting the fly or the fly line touch the water. This method is used to let line out while at the same time drying the fly and the line (Bean 1996). The flip method is another technique used to cast while fly fishing. In the flip technique the fishermen will let the current take their line and fly down river. Once the anglers are
happy with the amount of line let out they will simply flip the line up stream so the fly can drift down again.

The last major difference can be seen in comparing the fly to the lure or bait. Lures are usually made out of metal or some sort of plastic. However, for trout fishing at the Kern River most spin fishermen will use some sort of flashing spinner which is made out of metal or they will use bait. The most common choices of bait are worms and power bait. Power bait is simply artificial bait that is used to catch trout, it is most commonly found in a pasty clay like variety. A spin fisherman will tie a hook on his line along with a couple of sinkers and then cover the hook with power bait. The worms are usually night crawlers which is a folk name for earth worms. Similar to the power bait set up the spin fishermen will tie a hook and a sinker on and the run the hook through the worm. The spin fishermen will then cast his bait out and sit and wait for a hungry trout to come along and take the bait.

Flies on the other hand, can be made from all sorts of things including: elk hair, deer hair, many different types of bird feathers, muskrat undercoat, and the list goes on. For example an Adams dry fly is made of gray and black thread, hen hackle, hackle fibers, muskrat under fur, and rooster neck feathers (O’Reilly 2005). The earliest reference to fly tying material comes from Aelian’s Natural History where flies were being tied by wrapping red wool around a hook to mimic the bugs on the water (Herd 2005). Fly fishermen commonly tie their own flies which is an art in and of its self. The equipment is only one difference between fly fishermen and spin fishermen at the Kern River, these differences are not incidental but partly constitutive of the different
subcultures. Many believe fly fishermen are a distinct subculture one reason being fly fishing offers more of a spiritual experience than does spin fishing.

**Spirituality and Fly Fishing**

The differences between fly fishing and spin fishing are even more significant when one considers them in relation to spirituality. One rather famous connection between fly fishing and religion came through Robert Redford’s movie *A River Runs Through It*, based on Norman Maclean’s novel. “In our family, there was no clear line between religion and fly fishing” (Maclean 1976, 1). This line is quoted in almost every work done on the connection between fly fishing and spirituality. The connection between fishing goes back to fishing stories in the Bible, and today is included in what is known as nature religion. This line has become famous because it grabs at the subtle but definite spiritual feeling one gets when fly fishing. There has been ample work done on this topic. The objective in the following paragraphs will be to prove that there is considerable interest in this topic.

There is a deep interest by scholars in the fields of “lived religion” and “religion and nature.” These fields are trying to show the way in which religion relates to, constructs, and shapes the human to nature relationships in everyday practice (Snyder 2007). Religion arises when humans act in “subtle, intimate, and quotidian” ways making meaning for both individuals and groups (Orsi 1997, 6). Broadly speaking, religion is a “meaning making” activity (Orsi 1997). In more than one interview conducted for this research project the fly fishermen would comment on how time spent at the river puts everything into perspective and helps them to understand what is
important. Religion often creates opportunity by which people orient themselves to the world (Long 1999).

Even though fly fishermen are not attending religious services; it does not mean that experiences in both a church and on the river are not similar. While attending a religious service, the speaker is speaking to an audience, and everyone in the audience may receive a slightly different message from the same lecture. Similarly, two fly fishermen can be fishing rather close together and have two different experiences. Reflecting on the experience with others can add to the experience, or give the experience more meaning.

If one must compare fly fishing to a certain religion, Christianity would seem the most obvious choice. Fishing is referred to throughout the Bible, and the Holy Bible is the primary text of Christianity. The books of Mathew, Mark, Job, and John all have fishing references. Christianity is also the underlying language and expression of American nature writing (Gatta 2004). Learning from the Bible Christians believe in the ideal of Jesus being “fisher of men”, which furthers Christian legacy in fly fishing literature (Browning 1998). “Fishers of Men” is an interesting metaphor when applied to the fly fishermen at the Kern River. In biblical times fishing was a common practice used to gather food and sustain life; Jesus used the metaphor “fishers of men” for his disciples to gather more people to believe in God thus growing the amount of believers. Kern River fly fishermen are also “fishers of men”; they welcome beginners to the fly fishing community and in turn try to teach them the right way of taking care of the river, the fish, and the sport of fly fishing. Even Maclain’s famous line from A River Runs Through It “In our family there was no clear line between religion and fly fishing”
connects fly fishing to Christianity because the father was a Presbyterian preacher and Presbyterian is one of the denominations of Christianity (Snyder 2007). Interestingly, Samuel Snyder also points out that Sir Izaak Walton’s The Compleat Angler: Or The Contemplative Man’s Recreation published in 1963 has ranked third as the most printed text in the English language, behind only the Holy Bible and Pilgrim’s Progress (Snyder 2007).

In a study much like this one Samuel Snyder found that “fly fishers around the world frequently describe their experiences of fishing through the use of terms such as religious, spiritual, sacred, divine, ritual, meditation, and conversion” (Snyder 2007, 897). The results from Snyder’s interviews continue to mirror the interviews conducted here in that fly fishermen continually referred to the rivers and nature as their church or as a sacred place. Religious and sacred spaces used to only include structures like churches, synagogues, or demarcated structural areas. However, recently scholars have been expanding what they refer to as religious and sacred space, as Orsi argued, those “places where humans make something of the worlds they have found themselves thrown into (Orsi 1997: 6).” Some of the people interviewed talk about how the Kern River is a place where they go to re-center themselves, for instance Shane says that “standing in the river while fly fishing reminds him who is in charge and that is so humbling.”

The idea of sacred space is not a new one by any means. In the 1950’s Mircea Eliade published a book titled The Sacred & The Profane The Nature of Religion. In his book Eliade discusses the topic of sacred space. Eliade uses the term “hierophany” to describe when something sacred shows itself to us. Eliade believes that “man becomes aware of the sacred because it manifests itself, shows itself, as something wholly
different from the profane” (Eliade 1957, 11). Eliade continues his discussion of hierophanies by saying that “the most elementary hierophany is the manifestation of the sacred in some ordinary object such as a stone or a tree” (Eliade 1957, 11). Eliade also points out the fact that sacred objects are not adored for the objects themselves, but because they are hierophanies. Hierophanies show something that is no longer an object but the sacred. Interestingly enough Eliade only talks about fixed objects becoming sacred but in the case of fly fishermen the river seems to become sacred. Anyone who has spent much time on a river knows quite well that the river is always changing it is not a stationary object. Eliade also points out man’s desire to live in close proximity to the sacred and this is perfectly understandable because the sacred is saturated with endurance and efficacy.

Fly fishermen at the Kern River believe there is a spiritual aspect to fly fishing as well. On the Kern River Fly Fishing Forum Fishabuoy writes:

“About 6 years ago - I ventured on one of the longest solo trips I've ever done - an 8night, back country, bike-camping trip within an hour of the Bay Area, that happens to have a world class warm-water fishery bar none. I went for five days on this trip without seeing another human being....or speaking. It was one of the most refreshing, enlightening experiences I've ever had.

Shane (and others) makes a good point about wilderness and how it pares away the B.S. of the world - helping us to refocus on what is important. I call the trip my "great fast" because everything is stripped away to the basics of Creator, Creations, oneself, and some recreation (or is it RE-creation?) .....hard to get distracted by anything, or anyone, besides the only One that is important.

I've had many "spiritual" experiences in life...but fishing easily fits into that category too - almost by design it seems”.

Another member known as Blood_Knot posted a quote by Tony Blake which reads,

“Some go to church and think about fishing, others go fishing and think about God.”
Clearly even among those who are not authors there is a connection between fly fishing and spirituality.

**Culture**

Trying to distinguish between the two fishing (sub) cultures or any subculture for that matter is a rather difficult task. One reason it is so difficult is because the term culture is a very slippery term, one that is very hard to define. The following will use the work of great cultural thinkers in order to place fly fishing in the context of a subculture. When beginning a discussion of culture one great place to start is with Peter Jackson’s *Maps of Meaning*. Jackson refers to the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies working definition of culture, “the levels at which social groups develop distinct patterns of life” (Jackson 1989, 2). What Jackson is saying is that cultures are not just meanings and values carried around in one’s head; they are made concrete through social organization (Jackson 1989). Jackson’s idea directly relates to the fly fishing culture at the Kern River, fly fishermen of the Kern carry around certain morals and values in their heads that become concrete through the fly fishing forum and through organized social events. The fly fishing forum along with organized events throughout the year is the fly fishermen at the Kern River cultural *Maps of Meaning*. According to Jackson, maps of meaning are what make up the cultural landscape.

Some cultural geographers believe that the landscape can be read like a text. “Geographers have also begun to read the landscape, to refer to its biography and to employ the metaphor of landscape-as-text” (Meining 1979). One running theme throughout Jackson’s *Maps of Meaning* is the rejection of a “unitary and elitist view of culture” (Jackson 1989, 177). Jackson is not the only one to reject a unitary view of
culture; Denis Cosgrove believes “there are potentially as many ways of seeing (culture) as there are eyes to see” (Cosgrove 1985). Keeping authors like Cosgrove and Jackson in mind it is important to point out that this study presents only one view of the fishing culture of the Kern River. Reading the landscape is one thing and as Yi-fu Tuan points out experience offers another perspective.

Many of the topics Yi-Fu Tuan writes about can help to that there are two fishing cultures on the Kern River, his work on language and perception can be directly applied to trying to distinguish between two subcultures. Tuan talks about using language specifically words such as “us” and “them” which “creates an interpersonal intimacy and geographical distance” (Tuan 1977, 50). For instance, if one fly fisherman is talking to another fly fisherman he may refer to others fly fishermen as people like us, and he will likely refer to bait fishermen as people like them. Language like this creates separation and closeness at the same time, separation between the two different types of fishermen but closeness between fly fishermen. On the topic of perception Tuan goes into a discussion on spaciousness and crowding. He says that people most often feel crowded by people and not by things. Tuan gives an example of a shy pianist playing the piano in a room by himself; if someone walks into the room that pianist may feel “spatial constraint”. Tuan could have very well used the fishermen of the Kern River as an example here. Fly fishermen are most like the pianist in the sense that they feel crowded if someone else begins fishing the same section of river they are. On the other hand, bait fishermen do not seem to mind other fishermen as much as the fly fishermen do. There is no doubt that experience offers a different perspective; many cultural geographers have different perspectives on the idea of culture.
Culture is a topic that has long been debated. Don Mitchell even went as far as to say “there is no such thing as culture” (Mitchell 1995. On the opposite end of the spectrum culture has been described as “superorganic” in the words of James Duncan “Culture was viewed as an entity above man, not reducible to actions by the individuals who are associated with it” (Duncan 1980, 182). The superorganic theory was created by anthropologists Alfred Kroeber and Robert Lowie who were associated with Carl Sauer at Berkeley. This is important because Carl Sauer has often been referred to as the father of cultural geography and has influenced many well known cultural geographers. The fly fishing culture at the Kern River does not exist without the fly fishermen who uphold the values and pass them along to newcomers. So to say that culture is superorganic and exists above the individual level is simply not true when applied to the fly fishing culture at the Kern River.

However, Don Mitchell’s argument that “there is no such thing as culture” is a much better argument in terms of discussing the fly fishing culture of the Kern River. What Mitchell is arguing is that geographers are guilty of reifying culture; instead of studying culture Mitchell believes geographers should be studying the idea of culture. “It seems to me the most important role we have as cultural geographers is to explain the world around us” (Mitchell 1995,580). Mitchell makes a good point and one taken into consideration for this thesis. This study’s objective is not to reify culture, but to simply explain that there is a distinct difference between those who fly fish and those who bait fish at the Kern River. In a sense, this paper is following Mitchell’s recommendation that cultural geographers should try to explain the world around us. Nevertheless, trying to explain culture is not an easy task as Clifford Geertz so eloquently points out.
When embarking on a cultural study such as the fishing cultures at the Kern River, Clifford Geertz’s work on “Thick Description” is more than relevant. Geertz refers to many classic culture articles one of which includes great definitions of the word culture. Geertz refers to Clyde Kluckhohn’s *Mirror for a Man* which has eleven definitions of culture. The two that work well for this paper are “the social legacy the individual acquires from his group”, and a way of thinking feeling and believing” (Geertz 1973, 31).

Geertz refers to Max Weber belief, that “man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun, and culture is those webs” (Geertz 1973,31). This is a fitting analogy to culture and how complex and intertwined it truly is. Since culture is so complex studying it is a difficult task. Geertz believes the study of culture must be a semiotic one. Geertz uses a wink as an example of how there is underlying meanings or cultural meanings to facial expressions people make. The underlying meaning to facial expressions parallels the underlying meaning of the act of fly fishing. To the naked eye fly fishing is a method to catching fish, but at the Kern River it also means that the individual holds himself to a certain set of standards. Geertz also talks about how “cultural analysis is intrinsically incomplete” (Geertz 1973, 38). He believes that the study of culture is “not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning” (Geertz 1973, 31). This study on fly fishing at the Kern River is also not in search of law but it is one that is in search of what it means to be a fly fisherman at the Kern River and how that is different from being a bait fisherman on the Kern River.

**Subculture**

The main objective here is to show that the fly fishermen of the Kern River are a distinct subculture. The definition of subculture chosen here is “an ethnic, regional,
economic, or social group exhibiting characteristic patterns of behavior sufficient to
distinguish it from others within an embracing culture of society” (Merriam-
webster.com). Fly fishermen on the Kern River differ from bait fishermen in many ways.
Not only are Fly fishermen of the Kern River are a subculture because of their equipment
and the fact that fly fishing offers a more spiritual experience, but they differ in their
norms and values as well. Fly fishermen also spend most of the time wading in the river
while bait fisherman sit on the shore. Fly fishermen’s values differ in the sense that they
feel they treat the fish and the environment better than bait fishermen do. There is no
literature available on the fly fishing subculture of the Kern River so one must look to
research on other subcultures to see what theories are out there. A good place to find the
answer to questions about where and why is the discipline of geography.

Geographers have done some work on the topic of subcultures, but most of the
relevant work in geography is on culture and cultural landscapes. When researching
work on subcultures in geography, one will surely come across the book Subculture the
Meaning of Style by Dick Hebdige. Subcultures are often perceived negatively, mainly
because subcultures bring together people with similar interests who are generally
different from the majority of society (Hebdige 1979). Different does not always mean
different in a negative way. Regardless, as one begins to research subcultures, one will
begin to find plenty of information on rebel teens (Hebdige 1979).

Following the trail of rebel teens, one is able to find plenty of information on
music subcultures. Subcultures exist for just about every genre of music including jazz,
punk rock, country, hip hop, etc. Elizabeth Blair wrote an article for the Journal of
Popular Culture on the rap music of youth subculture. This article not only talks about
rap music subcultures but also refers to the punk rock subculture. One of the main points is that once a genre of music such as rap becomes commercialized, it loses some followers (Blair 1993). This parallels the transition from subculture to culture. Once something becomes popular in society it no longer falls under the category of subculture. The dictionary defines subculture as a group which exhibits characteristic patterns of behavior sufficient to distinguish from others within a culture or society (Merriam Webster 2011). Music preferences are not the only thing that creates subcultures; religious preference can also create a subculture.

One can easily argue that many religions can be considered a subculture or at least part of a subculture. For example, there is a vampire subculture that is defined as multi-faceted, socio-religious movement with a distinct community and network of people (Keyworth 2002). This subculture professes to be real vampires, they even have people that are blood donors who actually allow vampires to partake of them (Keyworth 2002). In response to the vampire subculture, another subculture has formed, the Christian counter movement, who call themselves “vampire slayers”. These so called slayers actively oppose the vampire subculture and its beliefs (Keyworth 2002). “Vampire Slayers” are crusading, self-righteous Christian’s intent on persecuting contemporary vampires (Keyworth 2002). They do this by bombarding vampire websites with hate mail, there are even rumors of vampire murders (Keyworth 2002).

Subculture Creation

Most of the literature on subculture describes the fact that subcultures find pleasure in being distinct from main culture (Fincham 2007). In a study on bicycle couriers two of the main reasons for being part of the courier subculture are to be
different and to have fun (Fincham 2007). All of the members in the subcultures described thus far choose to be part of these subcultures. However, some of those who find themselves part of a subculture did not necessarily choose to be part of it.

Sometimes being part of a subculture is due to things one cannot control, like a child’s social class or a child’s inability to do well in school (O’Connor 2004). A lot of early thinking on youth subcultures focused on these types of things. One can see the logic behind the thinking that poor kids hang out with poor kids because they understand each other and live in the same area. There is some logic behind thinking that kids who do not do well in school would create a subculture. However, more recent writing on subculture disagrees with the idea social class and education levels create certain subcultures (O’Connor 2004). Location seems to be more important in determining youth subculture than social class (O’Connor 2004). To prove that location is more of a factor than social class one sociological study uses a punk rock subculture (O’Connor 2004). Punk music developed at a different pace in different countries (O’Connor 2004). The conditions for bands to practice and the social organization of shows are different in each country, leading to different pace in each country’s punk scene development. The location of Kernville is an important factor when studying the area, but equally important is the place Kernville.

When discussing any aspect of human geography but especially the topic of place, one must look to the writings of Yi-Fu Tuan. As a human geographer, Yi-Fu Tuan has done a lot of work on place. In his work on space and place Tuan considers the ways in which people feel and think about space, how they form attachments to home, neighborhood, and nation. Place is security and space is freedom (Tuan 1977), the Kern
River offers both. To be part of the fly fishing subculture at the Kern River one has to truly know the river. To truly know a place one has to understand it in an abstract way and know it as one person knows another (Tuan 1975). To call the Kern River home, one must not only know what it looks like, but how it feels, smells, and tastes (Tuan 1989). In many Kern River fly fishermen’s opinions there is nothing prettier than the Kern River in the fall and nothing tastes better than a meal at McNally’s after a day of fly fishing. To study cultural geography, one must know the place and the people they are studying, maybe not as intimately as Tuan suggests but more so than just on paper.
Results

The method chosen to study the fishing cultures of the Kern River was to go out and interview fishermen at the Kern River. Semi-structured interviews were used, containing three conversation starting topics which were, do you think there is a true subculture of fly fishermen at the Kern River, do you think there is more of a spiritual aspect to fly fishing, and do you think fly fishing is more environmentally friendly than spin fishing? The interviewees were chosen randomly, most of the fishermen interviewed had either just finished fishing or were about to start. The majority of the fishermen ended up being fly fishermen mainly because they seemed more interested in the topic. It should also be noted that most fly fishermen at one time were also spin fishermen.

Subculture

The first question asked to each interviewee was “do you think there is a distinct subculture of fly fishermen at the Kern River, and why or why not?” The majority of the fishermen seemed to understand the question, mainly the term subculture. For those that did not understand the question, the question was then rephrased by asking is there something different about fly fishermen, would you say that they are a group within the group and why or why not? The question was clearly understood in all cases except at most two or three. The term subculture itself presents a problem. Much like the argument over term culture described above in the literature review, the term subculture is also very slippery. There are no guidelines as to what exactly comprises a subculture; there is not a list of things a group needs to be considered a subculture. Michael Clarke published an article in *The British Journal of Sociology* which offered a way of trying to define a subculture using four aspects including “size, specificity of boundaries,
inclusiveness, and identity” (Clarke 1974). The fact that many of the fishermen especially the fly fishermen interviewed believed there was a distinct subculture leads one to believe that self definition by members of a subculture could be a defining element. Self definition would fall under Clarke’s identity aspect. Clarke discusses how “in their strong form sub cultural membership is synonymous with social identity” (Clarke 1974, 433). However, considering the sponginess of the term subculture one would be hard pressed to make self definition a defining factor, although it is definitely something to consider. The overwhelming majority answered yes to this question, but the reasons why they did so varied from person to person. The spin fishermen who believed there was a true subculture of fly fishermen had a hard time coming up with reasons as to why they thought that fly fishermen were a subculture, but they clearly thought there was something different about them. In general, respondents gave three main reasons for believing that fly fishermen comprise a subculture: fly fishermen are more environmentally conscious, mature, and (loosely) socially-organized around the passionate guidance of Guy Jeans, a local fly-fishing advocate.

Tim Smith, a 48-year-old male fly fisherman from Lemoore, California, believes there is a distinct subculture of fly fishermen at the Kern River. Mr. Smith believes respect toward other fishermen is what differentiates fly fishermen from spin fishermen at the Kern.

The biggest thing I noticed is the lack of respect most spin fishermen give towards fellow anglers. I can't count the number of times I've had my hole jumped \(^1\)WHILE in the hole. I know it's happened to all of us at one time or another. Fly fishermen (for the most part), will usually acknowledge your presence and either move on or politely ask your permission to share the stretch of water. Fly fishermen (again for the most part) will abide by the laws set down to protect a species or the environment. All too often, we've seen spin fishermen tossing shiny, barbed lures into waters that are clearly marked

\(^1\) Having a hole jumped is when someone starts fishing the same pool without asking permission.
"Restricted Waters" with all the intentions of catching and removing their catch from said area. Well, that's my 2 cents. Hey, I was a spin fisherman at one time, tossing those pretty Panther Martins\(^2\), but once the fly fishing bug hit, I found it to be very easy to lay down the spinning rod and toss flies instead. And this is something that is shared by my family.

Interestingly, Mr. Smith had no idea that one of the next questions would be about the difference in environmental awareness between fly fishermen and spin fishermen.

Tim Smith’s answer can easily be related back to Yi-Fu Tuan’s comments on spaciousness and crowding. Tuan used the phrase “spatial constraint” in describing how people most often feel crowded by other people and not by things. Mr. Smith is complaining about how fly fishermen feel crowded when someone else (mainly spin fishermen) begin fishing the same stretch of water they are fishing. The point here is Tim Smith does not mention feeling crowded by over hanging trees or any other natural obstacle that would make casting his fly line difficult or confined. Tim Smith feels crowded and disrespected when just one other person begins fishing the same stretch of water he is on, much like the shy pianist that Yi-Fu Tuan mentions.

Mark Onoye is another fly fisherman who believes there is a distinct subculture of fly fishermen at the Kern River. Mr. Onoye is a 52-year-old male from Bakersfield, California. He found the question of whether the two sorts of fishermen form two subcultures a meaningful one.

This should be a good discussion and you will get a lot of interesting responses. The first thing I would say is that most fly fisherman practice catch and release\(^3\). I see very few bait fishermen on the Kern or elsewhere that do, unless they have already “limited out”\(^4\) as they like to say. I’m not trying to be snobbish on this; the Kern for the most part is a put and take fishery, at least in the easy road side sections. The fish are put there for a reason. I also think that fly fishermen are much more concerned about their impact on the

\(^2\) Panther Martins are a type of spinning lure used to catch trout.

\(^3\) Catch and release is the practice of catching fish and then releasing them back into the water unharmed.

\(^4\) Limited out is referring to the limit regulations. For most places including the Kern River fishermen are only allowed to keep up to five trout.
water. I don’t see litter left on the water by fly fishermen, but do see a lot of garbage left by bait guys. Things like worm and bait containers are pretty common. Also beer cans seem too heavy for the bait guys to lug back to their vehicles when they are empty. Long sections of monofilament are also common in the water and streamside trees. Acts of graffiti are another common site on the water side rocks and trees. I don’t know who is doing these stupid acts, but I doubt if it is fly fishermen.

Mr. Onoye’s answer is another one that touches on the environmental question that was to follow later in the interview.

Mark Onoye’s answers resembled Meining’s thoughts on the landscape being able to be read like a text. Mr. Onoye refers to the trash that he finds along the shoreline of the river such as bait containers, beer cans, and fishing line as a distinguishing feature between fly fishermen and spin fishermen. In Meinig’s chapter in The Interpretation of Ordinary Landscapes he breaks landscape down into ten different parts including “landscape as nature, as habitat, artifact, system, problem, wealth, ideology, history, place, and aesthetic” (Meinig 33-47). In his chapter Meinig talks about how the landscape can be viewed and interpreted different by each individual. Mark Onoye views the physical landscape as an increasing problem because of the amount of trash left behind. If the landscape can be read like a text as Meining suggests then one does not have to be expert in literature to read how spin fishermen are affecting the landscape according to Mr. Onoye.

Ryan McClain is a 31-year-old male fly fisherman from San Juan Capistrano, California.

There is a distinct fly fishing subculture on the Kern. Part of it is the Kern River it’s self, it is a wonderful freestone river with many different faces from the back country to the roadside fishing. You can catch three of the heritage trout in its drainage, little kern rainbow, Kern River rainbow and the golden rainbow. But I think the biggest reason for it is Guy Jeans. His enthusiasm, passion, ethics and love for the river and the sport of fly fishing is highly contagious. His passion draws in others of the same mind and because of that there is a tremendous group of fly fishers on the Kern. Also check out the Southern
Sierra Fly Fishers they are in my opinion a distinct group of Fly Fishers. I also forget at times that both the main fork and south fork of the Kern are designated wild and scenic rivers and there are not many rivers in the world where you can catch a 20 plus inch rainbow on dry flies in its native water.

At first Mr. McClain refers to the river and what the river has to offer as a reason as to why he believes there is a subculture of fly fishermen at the Kern. Mr. McClain then mentions Guy Jeans, the owner of the only fly shop in Kernville who is also a very well known fly-fishing guide. Mr. McClain does not mention it, but Jeans is also the one who started the online Kern River Fly Fishing forum where fishing reports and general discussion topics are posted daily. As Mr. McClain says, Jeans does have tremendous enthusiasm, passion, and love for both the Kern River and the sport of fly fishing all of which he spreads through the forum and his guided trips. Unknowingly, Mr. McClain also talks about the unique geography of the Kern River. Although he does not exactly say it, he touches on the fact that the Kern River is the southernmost trout fishery in California where one can catch a large trout. It should be pointed out that Mr. McClain lives in San Juan Capistrano, which is over three hours south of the Kern River. Like the words of Peter Jackson described earlier, part of what makes up a culture are meanings and values that become concrete through social organization. Peter Jackson does not comment much on cultural leaders. However, certain individuals within every culture play a major role in creating and or continuing their specific culture. In the case of the Kern River fly fishermen, Jeans is a prominent leader in creating the fly-fishing subculture. In the case of the Kern River fly-fishing sub-culture, Guy Jeans is the leader of what Jackson is referring to as far as social organization.

Another fly fisherman, 61-year-old Dan Miller from Yorba Linda, California, could not exactly say if Kern River fly fishermen were a distinct subculture. However,
Mr. Miller did suggest that fly fishermen show a level of maturity that differentiates them from others.

I would offer one great distinction between any true fly fisherman and those who fish by other methods: Fly fishermen do not feel the need to kill a fish to prove their prowess with a rod and reel. That is, the pursuit with a fly for a fish and the good fortune of hooking, landing, and releasing a fish is reward enough. To put it another way, anglers who kill fish do so in order to prove to others how "great" they are on the lake or stream. This is a childish or immature perspective that separates true fly fishermen from the rest. Don't misunderstand; it is appropriate sometimes to harvest a fish. What is important however is the motive behind such a harvest.

Mr. Miller believes that fly fishermen are rewarded through the process of fishing with a fly and if by chance they catch a fish feel the need to let it go. Other anglers feel the need to show their skill as an angler by showing off the fish they have caught and killed. Mr. Miller’s thoughts once again pertain to the perception that fly fishermen are more environmentally friendly than are spin fishermen. It is interesting that Mr. Miller uses the term “true” fly fishermen, which leads one to think that there may be fly fishermen who are not part of the sub culture. In his response Mr. Miller makes it clear that one of the unwritten rules of being a “true” fly fisherman is to practice catch and release. In reading Mr. Miller’s comments, one could argue that just because an individual catches fish using a fly pole does not make him a “true” Kern River fly fisherman.

In his resistance to the suggestion that fly fishermen comprise a subculture, it may be thought that Miller – perhaps unwittingly – gives voice to Don Mitchell’s argument that there is simply no such thing as culture. Mr. Miller never uses the word culture; he simply offers his thoughts on the distinctions between two groups of people. However, Mr. Miller clearly believes that fly fishermen, whether as a subculture or not, are more mature than other anglers because they do not pride themselves on showing off the fish they have caught. Mr. Miller’s comments do coincide with a definition of culture.
mentioned earlier. One of Clyde Kluckhohn’s definitions of culture in *Mirror for a Man* is “a way of thinking, feeling, and believing.” Using Kluckhohn’s definition of culture Mr. Miller is definitely a member of the fly fishing culture because his thoughts, feelings, and beliefs, clearly resemble those of the other fly fishermen interviewed.

Dan Flynn a 38-year-old from Los Angeles, California, is among the group who does believe there is a subculture of fly fishermen. His thoughts as to why fly fishermen are a subculture is along environmental lines as well. Mr. Flynn’s thoughts are similar to those of other fly fishermen discussed above.

I certainly think that fly fishermen are a distinct subculture - take their position on water management and you will find that fly fishermen have very differing views than the majority. I think surveys about water management given to fly fishermen vs. surveys about water management given to non-fly fishers would provide an undeniable statistical difference if the questions were structured right. The crux of the argument for fly fishermen will be the fish... the crux of the argument for non-fly fishermen will likely be 'not wasting water by letting it flow into the ocean'. I think that topic is the one that will provide the strongest basis for proving subculture by showing that the ideas of how the laws and actions of the majority are disturbing to fly fishermen, and would be carried out differently by the fly fishing community. Take a Bakersfield Farmer (non-fisher) vs. a Bakersfield fly fisher (non-farmer) vs. a Bakersfield resident that is neither a farmer nor a fly fisherman and ask them about water management... then provide statistics on how much of the Bakersfield population each group represents. Seems to me that you would establish that fly fishermen are clearly not the majority, and have a generally differing (from the majority) opinion if the questions on the survey were designed right. Just a thought, maybe I'm way off.

Mr. Flynn’s thoughts are similar to those of other fly fishermen discussed above. Once again this fly fisherman believes that the different values and thoughts about the environment are what separate fly fishermen from spin fishermen. Since one can define culture using Kluckhohn’s definition that a culture has similar thoughts, feelings, and beliefs then Mr. Miller’s words also prove there is some unique and similar about the fly fishermen of the Kern river.
Todd Lite is a 52-year-old male fly fisherman from Rancho Cucamonga, California. Lite believes that fly fishermen are a separate culture and Kern River fly fishermen are part of a nationwide fly-fishing culture.

I think fly fishing for trout does make this place special, but not one of a kind to my knowledge. Having fished in a large number of states I could compare several aspects of what would comprise "Fly Fishing Culture". Larger waters that support guides have services that cater to both conventional and fly fisherman. Most guides I have encountered are very conservation oriented. They set the tone for conservation culture of the fisherman. I don't believe the Kern has any professional guides that work with conventional tackle fisherman. As such I believe these fishermen have never been exposed to this kind of conservation based information.

Lite’s comments are interesting because he believes that there is such a thing as a fly fishing culture, which covers many states in the U.S. or at least the ones he has fished. Once again we see that conservation of the areas fished is again a running and distinguishing theme of fly fishermen. Mr. Flynn also credits Guy Jeans the guide at the Kern along with other guides at other rivers for promoting conservation of fisheries. Mr. Flynn is correct in that there is no spin-fishing guide on the Kern River to teach spin fishermen the importance of trying to conserve the local fishery. One could easily argue that this means that Guy Jeans the guide is a major reason there is a distinct (sub) culture of fly fishermen at the Kern River.

Rashad P. is a 45-year-old male from the Bakersfield area who fly fishes the Kern River frequently. Rashad believes there is a distinct subculture of fly fishermen at the Kern River.

Yes I would say there is a distinct subculture at the Kern and the difference would be the forum. I have met Fly Fishermen on the Upper Owens, Lower Owens, Hot Creek, Cottonwood creek, many So Cal creeks, Fall River, Merced, Truckee, East Walker, rivers around BC Canada, rivers east of Seattle, Michigan, and they mostly seem the same. Fly Fishermen tend to be concerned with the waters they fish, they tend to be courteous and
pick up after themselves. The forum makes the Kern unique because it helps unite the many fly fishermen that fish here.

Rashad much like Mr. Todd Lite believes there is a fly fishing culture. However, Rashad also thinks that the Kern River fly fishermen are different because they have the fly fishing forum which brings them closer together. One could start to make the argument that the fly fishing forum provided by Guy Jeans makes the fly fishermen at the Kern River a distinct subculture because it helps promote the same thoughts, feelings, and beliefs. The forum also creates a clear distinction between fly fishermen and spin fishermen. Referring back to Yi-Fu Tuan this also creates the perception of “us” (fly fishermen) and “them” (spin fishermen). According to Tuan this “creates an interpersonal intimacy and geographical distance (Tuan 50).”

Sal Matia is a 44-year-old fly fisherman from Palmdale California. Sal also believes there is a distinct subculture of fly fishermen at the Kern although he does state that specifically.

I started fly fishing around 1992 after moving back to my home state Idaho for college. Since that time we've lived in Montana, upstate New York, Washington State, and finally back to So Cal. I've also been a member of fly fishing forums since 1998 starting with FAOL and Piscatorial Pursuits. My take is that the Kern River Forum and SSFFC members do more to promote the sport of fly fishing to new people than any other entity. As a whole our community reaches out the new fly flickers more often and better than other forums. Some people get tired of helping new people and leave for other venues. Many of our group are tired of answering the same questions year after year and are also leery of poachers. The others who stick around believe that the future of fly fishing resides in newcomers and most of us don't care for some of the snobbery that comes with our territory. Most fly fisherman deny this attitude exists but it does within a small minority. Most people don’t remember twenty years ago when you'd be lucky to see one fly fisherman on the Kern over a weekend. Even ten years ago they weren’t common. Now they're everywhere and in the winter months that's all you'll see on the river. During the two year stocking ban fly fishers were the only people on the river... That shows a true love for the river and sport. The Kern River forum is hugely responsible for this growth. Many people despise the forum and its promotion of the Kern but to each their own. I personally believe that the more fly fishermen on the river the better the long
term prognosis for environmental goals and improvements. Some people hate the fly shop because it makes money off the forum. So what! I count my blessings every time I drive past the fly shop. Kernville would suck without a fly shop. Guy took a huge risk opening that place and is living the American Dream. What would our options be? Buying fly gear at the James Store? Anyways I say....keep reaching out to new people and let's fully occupy the Kern with fly fishermen!

The comments made by Sal were rather interesting, by far the most opinionated of all. Sal believes there are two reasons there is a distinct subculture of fly fishermen at the Kern River. One reason is the fishing forum and the other reason is that members of the fly fishing culture have promoted and spread the art of fly fishing to newcomers. Sal like many of the others also refers to the environmental aspect of being a fly fisherman as something they teach and preach to newcomers. As referred to earlier, Peter Jackson refers to culture as being “the levels at which social groups develop distinct patterns of life” (Jackson 1989, 2) in his book *Maps of Meaning*. One can easily see here that Sal is describing some of the different levels where Kern River fly fishermen are developing distinct patterns of their own.

Shane Conrad is a male fly fisherman from Los Angeles California. He did not specify his age but mid-forties would be a good guess. Shane was not sure if there is a distinct subculture of fly fishermen at the Kern River. He does however believe there are some differences between the two types of fishermen.

I am not too sure if there is a fly fishing subculture up here, I am not sure I know what a subculture is exactly. Your question does bring to mind a story that pretty much sums up the differences between the two for me. I caught a stocker at the 'vous' on the Lower. There were a couple of guys spin fishing below me. They were nice enough guys until I threw that fish back. You would have thought I'd taken food off of a starving man's table (and trust me, these guys weren't starving). The guy kept alternating between the "incredulous salute" (turning his palms skyward, shrugging, looking me square in the eye and saying "Dude?") then turning and looking at his buddy, shaking his head, and saying "He just threw it back -- Can you believe it, he threw it back". I didn't want to be a further

---

5 The vous is a nickname for a fishing spot on the lower Kern River. Fly fishermen will often use code names for areas so the places they fish will be kept somewhat of a secret.
irritant, but it just kind of snuck out of my mouth when I said: "Sorry guys – fly fishing here". Still cracks me up thinking about it.

Mr. Conrad’s story does have some relevant points to the topic. Like many of the other fly fishermen Mr. Conrad also thinks fly fishermen practice catch and release while spin fishermen do not. His story also gets at the “us” and “them” idea that Tuan so eloquently describes. In listening to him tell his story one could also sense a bit of tension between the two types of fishermen. The catch and release issue seems to be the major cause of tension. The two bait fishermen were visibly upset that Mr. Conrad released his fish back into the river.

Bait fishermen were also not as vocal on the topic of fly fishermen being a subculture. Most acknowledged that there were some differences between the two methods of fishing. Eric Alvarez, a 26-year-old spin fisherman from Sylmar, California, believes there is a subculture of fly fishermen at the Kern River. “Yes fly fishermen are a distinct subculture up at the Kern. I do not quite know the difference though. Fly fishermen do not seem as talkative or friendly; they go off on their own and do their thing.” It is understandable for spin fishermen to not exactly know the difference between the two cultures; they simply have not ever been part of it. In the interview with Mr. Alvarez he used the term “they” when referring to fly fishermen which goes back to Tuan and his writing about language and the geographic distance that certain terms can create. Using just the words Mr. Alvarez used in the interview one could make the argument that there are two separate groups of fishermen at the Kern River.

Another spin fisherman, 27-year-old Jay Montes, of Pomona, California, does not think that fly fishermen are a subculture. “No I don’t think fly fishermen are a subculture. Other than the equipment there is no difference between the methods.
Fishing is fishing people go to the kern to catch fish.” Dylan Downey a 24-year-old from Chatsworth was another bait fisherman who did not believe that there was a subculture of fly fishermen at the Kern River. “There isn’t a subculture here at the Kern, there are fishermen, there are rafters, and there are campers but there isn’t a subculture. Rafters may fish and fishermen may raft, but fishing is fishing and rafting is rafting.”

Phil Martinez also commented on rafters, campers, and fishermen. Mr. Martinez, who is a 27-year-old fly fisherman from San Louis Obispo California, does, however, believe there is a distinct subculture of fly fishermen at the Kern River.

Yes I definitely think there is a subculture of fly fishermen for southern California and the Kern. I think there is a huge clash between those who go to the kern to fly fish and those who go there for other reasons. What I mean is people who go there to camp, raft, etc also bait fish. It is these people who don’t respect the river they leave trash and they kill most of the fish they catch. They have no concern for leaving fish for other people. Fly fishermen really have respect for natural resources and the environment and future healthy fisheries for generations to come.

Martinez comments on a clash between fly fishermen and other groups, not just spin fishermen. Martinez believes campers and rafters also spin fish in their free time, and the fish they catch they end up killing. In Martinez’s opinion these other groups are destroying the Kern River for future generations.

Chris Cameron also believes there is a subculture of fly fishermen at the Kern River. Mr. Cameron practices spin fishing and fly fishing; he is a 35-year-old male from Ventura California.

Yes I think there is a subculture of fly fishermen, from what I’ve seen of fly fishermen anywhere not just the Kern River. There is a sense of being respectful and proud of what they are doing. Many of the people I’ve met take pride in the resources at the kern, they take pride in the fish, letting them go, handling them properly treating them right when they catch them. Before I started fly fishing I did the same things they do id kill the fish mainly because I didn’t know I wasn’t aware of what I was doing. Now that I fly fish I notice the difference. Of the fly fishermen I met some are a little stand offish there is a
sense of pride of letting people in. it takes time to get to know these people so they let you in, till you become part of their little click. You must prove to them that you believe and practice the right things on the river. There definitely seems to be a little clique.

Mr. Cameron’s response can fall under Geertz’s thick description. Mr. Cameron is saying it isn’t until you become a fly fisherman that you are able to understand a lot of what being a fly fisherman is about. In Geertz’s article he talks about the study of culture needing to be semiotic. Mr. Cameron talks about not being let into the “clique” until you prove to these people that you abide by the unwritten rules of fly fishing.

It is rather interesting that some of the spin fishermen did not believe there was a true subculture of fly fishermen. This may be because these spin fishermen have not really paid attention or simply do not care. As previously discussed, fly fishermen seem to be more aware of their surroundings, not just the bugs and the fish but also cleanliness and health of the river itself. Spin fishermen do not seem as aware of these types of things. This lack of awareness may have contributed to them not seeing the subculture of fly fishermen.

Spirituality and Fly Fishing

Is there more of a spiritual aspect to fly fishing than there is to spin fishing? This is a good question to ask when trying to figure out if there is a true subculture of fly fishermen at the Kern River. The novel and movie A River Runs Through It is rather popular amongst fly fishermen because it touches on the feeling one gets while fly fishing. One of the main reasons this question has been included is because through personal experience there is some more spiritual when fly fishing than when spin fishing. If the results of the interviews show there is more of a spiritual feeling to fly fishing than this is also another reason fly fishermen are a subculture or a group within the group.
They are experiencing something deeper than the spin fishermen and having this in common with one another may be one defining factor of the difference between the subculture of fly fishermen and the overall fishing culture.

Bill Williams, a 65-year-old fly fisherman from Kernville, gave an interesting answer when he was asked about spirituality and fly fishing.

Personally, for me, it’s not actually fly fishing that’s spiritual. However, the places I go and the calm I receive from those places could be spiritual. Fly fishing is merely a reason to be in those places; having the water wash over your legs, the sun on your back, the sounds and the silence. For me, fly fishing is just a good excuse to be standing in a river. If you ever see me standing in a river doing nothing...Then either I have reached the pinnacle of Zen, or completely lost my mind - both being distinct possibilities. I prefer the melodic trance of tossing dry flies, or the ever present nature of drifting nymphs over chucking clunky shiny objects. So for me, fly fishing is just my chosen method, and reason to be in God's back yard.

Mr. Williams answer to the spirituality question can easily be related to what Charles Long wrote in *Signs, Symbols, and Images in the Interpretation of Religion*. “Religion often creates opportunity by which people orient themselves to the world” (Long 1999, 7). Mr. Williams feels as if “standing in a river with the sun at his back is God’s backyard,” thus giving him the feeling of being in the house of God or at least in his backyard.

Tim Smith, a fly fisherman from Lemoore, California, offered another interesting answer to the question of spirituality and fly fishing.

It's not about the size or amount of fish. It's being in the moving water with all the beauty that surrounds us. It's the thrill of the hunt and the comfort of knowing the catch will live to see another day. It's the special breed of angler that's courteous and respectful. It's the sportsman who's acutely aware of the fragile environment and strives to promote its protection and longevity. We've all had banner days and skunks - doesn't matter - it’s always a great day. No matter what the religious or non-religious preference - if that's not spirituality, I don't know what is!
Mr. Smith clearly separates religion and spirituality in his answer. He believes that releasing the fish unharmed along with being courteous and respectful while enjoying the beauty of the area is a spiritual act. The difference between religion and spirituality is that most religions offer a specific set of beliefs or rituals for people to follow in order to get in touch with their innate spirituality (world blessings.com). Spirituality is reaching beyond the material world and feeling a connection to something greater, so simply put spirituality is a feeling of something larger or divine that religions are trying to get people in touch with. Both him and Mr. Williams feel that standing in the river itself adds to what they feel is a spiritual experience. But what is spirituality really? Philip Sheldrake defines spirituality as “an inner path enabling a person to discover the essence of his or her being; or the deepest values and meanings by which people live” (Sheldrake 2007). Both Mr. Williams and Mr. Smith use standing in the river to discover their essence of being.

Some answers to the question got more religious than spiritual. Mark Onoye placed fly fishing somewhere between the spiritual and the religious.

Trout inhabit the most beautiful places. Rivers, streams and creeks are the arteries that carry the lifeblood of the planet. For many of us fishing is a journey that takes us to these places. When I'm on the water there is no TV, telephone, or other modern day distractions. It is good for my soul to experience these places where there are no modern intrusions. This fishing journey is the vehicle that takes me there. Don't really care if I catch fish. But it's nice to know they are there so I keep looking.

Mr. Onoye starts off similar to the first two answers with talk of the beauty of the place. However, one could argue that his description of “fishing” being “a journey” that takes him to “places” that are “good for my soul” is starting to transition toward religious. Almost all religions talk about the human soul including major religions such as, Christianity, Buddhism, Judaism, and Catholicism. At the same time soul is a spiritual
term. Subjectively, speaking Mr. Onoye gave his answer with a religious over tone, but just analyzing his words on paper he is not clearly speaking about religion or spirituality.

Shane Conrad clearly brings religion into the picture with his answer.

Jesus went into the wilderness for a reason! To clear his mind for upcoming hard decisions. What better place for fly fishermen than soothing waters surrounded by beauty to clear his mind? It's a reminder of who's really in charge and is so humbling. Sometimes it takes getting away to turn off your brain so you can turn it on later.

Mr. Conrad also talks about the soothing river water and the beautiful scenery, but he also uses Jesus’ name. Jesus is the son of God according to the bible, so in essence Mr. Conrad feels he is following in the footsteps of the Messiah. Mr. Conrad is not the only with an answer that had a religious overtone.

Dan Miller the 61-year-old male from Yorba Linda, California offered the following response.

Almost every time that I have been fishing I am alone, except for the wildlife that inhabits the streams and the forests through which they flow. The myriad interrelated activities among the insects, birds singing, fish, snakes and lizards, the deer and mountain lion, the rodents scurrying about, the trees hiding migrant warblers on their way north to nesting grounds all reveal the creativity and joy of Creation. God made us able to comprehend this creativity and made us creative in our individuality and our relationships. When I return to civilization and re-engage with people I am renewed and able to remember why I'm here, what really matters in life, that life is precious and very brief. And that I am owed nothing. I owe everything to the one who bore the cross on my behalf, and that I am loved. And from the brief encounters with trout throughout my life, I have yet to figure out why I keep losing out to a creature with a brain no bigger than a pencil dot. So I am humbled and joyful about it, and dream of going back to try again.

Miller’s response brings to mind a lot of what Orsi (1997) argues in his article *Lived Religion in America*. Orsi claims that religious and sacred spaces have expanded to all “places where humans make something of the worlds they have found themselves thrown into” (1997, 6). It is quite clear when looking at Mr. Miller’s comments that he is a spiritual person and he makes it clear that one of the places he chooses goes to feel closer
to God. The Kern River is clearly a sacred space to Mr. Miller and like Eliade said in *The Sacred and The Profane* “the sacred is saturated with being” (Eliade 12). Here Eliade is saying that the sacred is associated with enduringness and efficacitity (Eliade 12).

Being at the river fishing makes Brown aware of God and creation that is associated with the enduringness that Eliade is referring to.

The response from Sal Matia is a good example the sacred space that Eliade is referring to. Mr. Matia is the 44-year-old fly fisherman from Palmdale, California.

I go fishing to witness God's work. I am surrounded by it. From the mountains that tower above me to the eruption of a fish through the surface of my favorite water, I am given the opportunity to witness the power of my god, and step away from the world tainted by mankind. It is the driving force behind my obsession with the outdoors. The closeness I feel with God when heading for the hills is unmatched in any other place I have been. We are all blessed. However, the ones who realize it truly live a fruitful and wonderful life!

Mr. Matia clearly finds the Kern River and the wilderness to be sacred. Interestingly he uses the phrase “my God” which confirms that he is not part of any organized religion. Unbeknownst to him he is clearly practicing a lived nature religion. He feels connected to his God when he is in the wilderness, or, as Orsi suggests, nature helps Mr. Matia “find his place in the world we were thrown into” (6).

Some people, like Ryan McClain, do not necessarily find the river sacred but find fishing and fishermen as things related to sacredness. Ryan McClain is a 31-year-old fly fisherman from Southern California. It should be pointed out that Ryan is an active participant in the Christian church although that is rather apparent in his answer.

Being a person of faith, I do believe there is a connection. Is it any coincidence that Jesus first disciples he chooses are fisherman? In fact Peter, James and John become his closest friends. I was listening to a podcast of one of my favorite authors the other day and he was actually talking about this story of Jesus and the disciples. Of how Jesus in his first encounter with Peter, James and John was out on a fishing boat and he tells them to put the nets down on the other side of the boat. Well I'm sure you have all heard the
story, Peter does and he brings in the biggest haul of fish he has ever caught. Now let’s go to the scene after Christ dies and he is now going to encounter the same guys but in a little different way. It is a few days after Christ’s death and Peter, James and John don’t know what to do. They have followed this man for the past 3 years and now they think he is dead and gone. So Peter does what only comes naturally, he goes fishing, and James and John go with him. They go out onto the Sea of Galilee and fish all night but they get nothing, I mean they get royally skunked. Now enter Jesus into the scene, he is walking along the beach and he calls out to the men in the boat, "Friends haven't you any fish". Peter shouts back, "NO". Jesus yells back "throw your nets on the other side of the boat". They have no idea who is yelling at them and I'm sure they initially thought who does this guy think he is? But probably out of their pure exhaustion and desperation they go ahead and try it, and again they get a huge haul of fish. Instantly Peter realizes who it is, he screams "It's the Lord". He jumps off the boat and swims to shore. Isn't that cool, Jesus first encounter after His Resurrection with his buddies is fishing, in exactly the same way he met them the first time. They all come ashore and Jesus already has fish on the fire ready for breakfast and they begin to start telling all their old fishing stories
and relive the original encounter.... What a playful side of Jesus that I had never thought about. I just think it's very interesting that Jesus chose fishermen to be his closet allies.....he might know something we don't. Or maybe we do? I love the line from "A River Runs Through It" when the narrator and author of the film is Norman Maclean and he is telling the story about how his father the Presbyterian Preacher always taught them: "That Christ disciples are fishermen and all first class fishermen on the Sea of Galilee were fly fishermen."

Mr. McClain believes that Jesus was a fisherman and that Jesus’ closest allies were fishermen. Like discussed in the review of the relevant literature fishing is referred to throughout the Bible. Mr. McClain believes that the act of fly fishing and the relationship he has with other fishermen is religious and follows in the footsteps of Jesus Christ. Interestingly enough, Mr. McClain also quotes the movie A River Runs Through It. In A River Runs Through It the father who is a Presbyterian Preacher says “In our family, there was no clear line between religion and fly fishing” (Maclean 1976, 1). Like the preacher in A River Runs Through It, it seems as if there is not a clear line between Mr. McClain’s’ religion and fly fishing either.

For others like Rashad P., the 45-year-old from Bakersfield, there is a clear line between fly fishing and religion or at least spirituality.
You can make of it what you want. Being on the water in a remote location is special and I feel blessed for that. But there are things that make me feel more spiritual. Like the births of all my kids. I am not trying to compare but that is what it is all about. I do feel blessed to have learned this wonderful sport at a young age and have many years into it. I have also taught all of my kids. So I do feel blessed. But the act of fishing and being at the river is not something I feel is spiritual, it is more that I feel blessed to be able to go to these places and fish.

Unlike the other responses thus far Rashad does not feel that fly fishing is spiritual or religious. He makes it clear that being physically able to fly fish as well as teach his children the sport is a blessing, but fly fishing does not give him a spiritual feeling.

Todd Lite, the 52-year-old fly fisherman from Rancho Cucamonga, California also does not think that fly fishing is necessarily a spiritual act.

Most of us just enjoy the peace that is associated with fly fishing. Is there a better way of spending our free time? Sitting by the water, just watching and listening is almost as good as actually fishing. I don't know if fly fishing can be classified as "spiritual", but it sure can be called tranquil. It is the best medication for relieving stress that I know of. And now you know the reason so many fishermen make the jump to fly fishing. It’s not all about catching a ton of fish. Look at the path many of us took to get here: Bait and bobbers, to lead head jigs, lures and rubber worms, fly and bobber and finally FLY FISHING. It isn't that we are snobs. We just enjoy the tranquility of being out in nature.

It is rather interesting that Mr. Lite chose to use the word tranquil instead of spiritual. It may be a bit of a stretch but spirituality and tranquility are somewhat connected. Most people find spirituality or religion in tranquil places. Religion offers people of faith a comforting feeling, it puts their mind at ease, it relieves the stress of whatever is going on in their life, it can be said religion and spiritual places offer people tranquility. The tranquility that Mr. Lite is referring to sounds rather similar to the spirituality that some of the others have referred to when fly fishing.

A 66-year-old fly fisherman from Encino, California who goes by the name Kentucky Jim offered an interesting response.
In a book I read Blue Highways, William Least Heat Moon talks about his visit to a monastery in Georgia. He starts a discussion with a monk there, who quickly tells him "Talk about spiritualism is bullshit". Strange talk for a monk, and yet I get it. Isn't sitting on a bank on a warm summer afternoon with scudding cumulus clouds overhead, with a bobber above a bunch of worms, waiting for a Bluegill to take it calm, relaxing, serene? Seems to me that it is. So fly fishing isn't unique in that respect, at least not to me. I can't say exactly why I enjoy fly fishing; I just do. For me, it is important to respect all fishermen, in whatever manner they've chosen to pursue their chosen fish. Of course, we could go on about the bad habits of some bait fishermen, but that is beside the point here. Fly fishing is the type of fishing I most enjoy. And fly fishing for trout is about my favorite type of fly fishing. I always say, trout don't live in ugly places. They live in beautiful places, and that's where I want to be. To paraphrase the bank robber when asked why he robbed banks, I fish for trout because that's where they keep the beauty. And, I think I fly fish for them because it takes longer than with power bait.

Kentucky Jim offers a variety of answers to the question. First, he makes it clear that he does not believe fly fishing is more spiritual than bait or spin fishing. In describing fishing along the river he chose to use the words “calm, relaxing, and serene.” Kentucky Jim feels that the “calm, relaxing, and serene” act of fishing is spiritual. The words Kentucky Jim chose to use are similar to Pete’s choice of tranquil; it is almost as if Kentucky Jim’s answer bridges together the words spiritual and tranquil. Like previous answers and the theory behind the lived nature religions, Kentucky Jim finds is able to find his center in the hectic world in which we live.

Dan Flynn the fly fisherman from Yorba Linda, who did not specify his age, has quite a different take on spirituality then the others interviewed did. For me, the essence of spirituality is not where it is, what is said, but a feeling of being immersed and devoted to the task at hand. The circumstances could be fishing scenarios or someone serving a need in a squalid urban, or third world setting, or the simple chores of the day. The strength of the spirituality is not the language, the location, but simply the effort in a place of need. Do most of the folks that provide service or support to others get recognition? No. Do they want the recognition? No, again. I would like to catch more fish. However, the learning curve is slow when taking up fly fishing compared to spin/ bait fishing. Do I feel more spiritual or less spiritual after a day of fly fishing? Neither. Would I go out of my way just to catch big fish? No. Am I happy that I can enjoy Kern River fishing with the same ease I do all my other chores? You betcha.
By looking at Mr. Flynn’s answer it seems that he finds spirituality in being devoted and immersed into any certain task. Oddly enough, Mr. Flynn finds spirituality in fly fishing and household chores along with things like helping in third world countries. One could take what Mr. Flynn said and go a number of different directions. In the context of this study, it is thought that what Mr. Flynn was trying to say is that staying committed to a task no matter how difficult it is spiritual. Mr. Flynn points out that the learning curve is much longer for fly fishermen than it is for spin fishermen for a reason. One could argue that what Mr. Flynn is saying is the more difficult the task the more spiritual the feeling when the task is completed and if you can find spirituality this way than all tasks seem easy.

Billy McCants, a 51-year-old fly fisherman from Bakersfield, humorously refers to the Kern River as his church.

Have you ever heard the quote that goes something like, ‘some people go to church and think about fishing and others go fly fishing and think about God’? Well I actually went to ‘church’ yesterday with my son-in-law. We each ‘prayed’ on and blessed four nice congregants. Used black sinking stone flies and Kern Candy in this blessed communion service.

Even though McCants was making somewhat of a joke his comments do have a lot of meaning. McCants did not appear to be a person of any particular religion; however he does appear to find a closeness to God when out fly fishing the Kern River.

Unfortunately, McCants did not expand on his answer as his interview was rather brief. Although brief, his answer does build upon the fact that there fly fishermen at the Kern River do feel there is some spiritual and sometimes a religious aspect to fly fishing.

Eric Alvarez, a spin fisherman from Sylmar, California, does not believe there is a spiritual aspect to fishing the Kern River. “No I don’t feel there is a spiritual aspect to
fishing really. I feel like fishing is about just going out there and having a good time. I like to have a couple of beers and do what I do. I look at fishing as more of a pastime while I’m camping more than anything.” Mr. Alvarez is not the only spin fisherman that feels there is not a spiritual aspect to fishing. Jay Montes offered a similar response.

There may be a spiritual feeling to fishing for some people. I just don’t feel spiritual when I am out fishing. My main objective is to go out and catch some fish. I like fishing a lot, been doing it a long time, but I have never felt spiritual about it. My family will say a blessing before we eat a meal of any kind and when its fish that’s about as spiritual as I get.

These two answers are obviously not enough of a sample to indicate how the majority of spin fishermen feel about the link between spirituality and fishing but it is clear neither of these two feel there is a link. It is also rather interesting that they have never really even thought of it, where as the fly fishermen who do not feel fly fishing is a spiritual activity seem to be able to see why one could consider fly fishing to have a spiritual feeling.

A large number of fly fishermen started out fishing using a spinning rod and bait. The reason most fishermen start out with a spinning rod and bait is simply because it is much cheaper and easier to learn and be successful. Phil Martinez talks a little bit about the differences between the two methods having been one of those people who spin fished first before learning to fly fish.

Fly fishing is a whole different experience, with fly fishing I’ve had to understand a lot more of what the fish are eating, where the fish are holding, I’ve just had to understand a lot more in general. I think through that you get a lot stronger of a connection to the environment and to the interconnectedness of nature in general. As compared to throwing a worm on a hook and just dunking it in the river and keeping your fingers crossed and hoping you’re catching a fish. So with fly fishing you become a lot more observant of things and every aspect that nature has to offer. I was raised Buddhist but I do not consider myself religious; I do feel I am spiritual though. Being able to see the interconnectedness of everything while fly fishing is what it is all about.
Even though Mr. Martinez does not view himself as religious his Buddhist upbringing surfaces when he talks about the interconnectedness of everything. According to Mr. Martinez the reason he believes there is more of a spiritual aspect to fly fishing is being able to understand the interconnectedness of everything. When he talked about his days fishing with a spinning rod and bait he would just sit with his fingers crossed hoping to catch fish. In becoming a fly fisherman he has had to learn more about nature in order to understand how to catch fish. Mr. Martinez is not the only one to compare the spirituality of his spin fishing days to his fly fishing days.

Chris Cameron of Ojai California also was a spin fisherman long before he learned how to fly fish. Mr. Cameron’s answer is somewhat similar to Mr. Martinez’s. I absolutely feel there is more of a spiritual aspect to fly fishing than there is to spin fishing. I fished with a spinning for a long time before I began fly fishing. I noticed that when I started fly fishing and even more now that it is not really as much about catching fish as it is about being out alone in nature and enjoying everything that is going on around you. Whether it be the wildlife, the vegetation, the water, the clarity of the water, but there is definitely something beyond the fishing. Some of my best days have been where I don’t catch a lot of fish or any fish for that matter. The fishing to me is just a bonus and catching fish is just a bonus as well. I feel like when I used to sit on the bank with a can of worms I wasn’t getting out of it what I’m getting out of it now. I used to sit in just one spot and miss out on a lot of things like seeing all of the things I just talked about and seeing what’s around the next corner. Fly fishing I am always moving up the river and one of my favorite things is always wanting to see what’s around the next bend in the river.

Mr. Cameron “absolutely” feels that there is more of a spiritual aspect to fly fishing. Like Mr. Martinez he feels like he sees nature in an entirely new light. Mr. Cameron also mentions that catching fish is just a bonus, fly fishing is more about just being out there and enjoying everything that is going on around you. Once again Mr. Cameron’s experience is much like the “lived religion” that Samuel Snyder refers to, in that scholars of “lived religion” are trying to show the way in which religion relates to, constructs, and
shapes the human to nature relationships in everyday practice (Snyder 2007). It can also be argued that in both Mr. Cameron’s and Mr. Martinez’s experience of transforming into fly fishermen that they have also had a “hierophany” to use Mircea Eliade’s word from *The Sacred & The Profane*. Both Mr. Cameron and Mr. Martinez as fly fishermen now see the Kern River and fly fishing as something more than just ordinary fishing something sacred.

**Environment**

One of the three conversation starting questions for this study was, “Do you believe fly fishermen are more environmentally friendly than are spin fishermen?”

Unexpectedly and interestingly, one of the main reasons the people interviewed gave for fly fishermen being a true subculture was that fly fishermen are more concerned with the environment. Inevitably, because of the overlap between the two answers there will be some repetitiveness in this section. However, this section on the environmental aspect is important and has something to offer as far as the overall study is concerned. Since the overwhelming consensus believe fly fishermen are more environmentally sensitive it seems as if putting the answers in the categories of pollution and preservation is more logical.

Mark Onoye believes fly fishermen are more environmentally friendly because of the amount of trash he sees left by spin fishermen. I think that fly fishermen are much more concerned about their impact on the water. I don’t see litter left on the water by fly fisherman, but do see a lot of garbage left by bait guys. Things like worm and bait containers are pretty common. Also beer cans seem too heavy for the bait guys to lug back to their vehicles when they are empty. Long sections of monofilament are also common in the water and streamside trees. Acts of graffiti are another common site on the water side rocks and trees. I don’t know who is doing these stupid acts, but I doubt if it is fly fisherman.
Trash along the Kern River is a theme many other fly fishermen are concerned about. In fact, there are several clean up days put together throughout the year where fly fishermen get together and go up and down the river picking up trash.

Chris Cameron is a Kern River fly fisherman who has participated in some of the clean up days.

I have personally participated in clean up days organized by fly fishermen. Most of the trash we pick up along the river is spin fishing equipment like empty worm containers, salmon egg containers, empty hook packages, and lots and lots of old tangled fishing line. The one thing you don’t find any of is fly fishing trash. That is one of the biggest differences that I have seen personally. Also through countless conversations with other fly fishermen, this seems to be one of the reasons fly fishermen can come across as standoffish toward spin fishermen.

One can easily see how frustrating it can be to have set days throughout the year to clean up trash in order to try and keep the place you like to go clean. It can be even more frustrating when you can pin point certain groups of people who are leaving the trash behind. One fly fisherman offered up his opinion as to why he thinks spin fishermen end up leaving so much trash behind.

Some believe education plays a big role in the way people treat the local environment. Todd Lite answer touched on this under the subculture question section. Rashad P. offers up a similar reason for the amount of trash spin fishermen seem to leave behind.

I know you need to remain focused on the Kern, but generalities apply. Having watched and participated in this argument and attempted environmental mitigation on a number of rivers, I’ve made a few observations. Fly fishers are forced to absorb more information about their sport. They must learn the interdependence of the prey and forage and the type and quality of the water before they become successful. Usually this gives rise to an appreciation of the environment they’re fishing in. This is reinforced by the language and tradition set forth by those they receive instruction from, be it by media or in person. Any contact with the tradition of fly fishing is going to enforce the concepts of stewardship and etiquette. Spin fishing does not have a storied tradition, so to speak, and the entrance level requirements are far easier to acquire. I'm not trying to sound elitist, but the process
of learning to fly fish seems much more likely to produce someone who appreciates the surroundings they practice their sport in. In fact, many fishermen who evolve from spin to fly gain an appreciation for environmental issues along with the skills to wave the long rod.

Rashad offers up some very interesting insight. He believes the process of learning to fly fish which involves understanding a lot about the environment promotes respect of the environment in and of itself. Furthermore, he believes that because fly fishing is more difficult to learn it is almost inevitable that a novice will seek advice and the advice he receives will include proper ways to take of the environment that is involved. Does the tradition of fly fishing offer one the concepts of stewardship and etiquette as Rashad suggests? The answer to that question is beyond the scope of this study but it is an interesting question to ponder, and it offers a possible solution as to how to begin changing the spin fishing culture.

Philip Martinez of San Louis Obispo California also chose to comment more on the amount of trash left behind by spin fishermen as the main reason why he believes that fly fishermen are more environmentally friendly than spin fishermen. Without a doubt fly fishermen are more environmentally friendly than spin fishermen. One, fly fishermen all seem to practice catch and release, but more importantly fly fishermen also do not leave trash along the river. Spin fishermen leave power bait cans, worm containers, hooks, and split shots which contain lead. In general the trash they leave is mainly fishing equipment which makes it obvious who is responsible.

People like Mr. Martinez chose to focus more on the amount of trash left behind by spin fishermen, but the majority focused more on the catch and release aspect when asked about why they feel fly fishermen are more environmentally friendly when compared to spin fishermen.

Catch and release is practiced by most fly fishermen. It is the process of catching a fish, handling it properly and releasing it back into the river unharmed. Guy Jeans
frequently offers tips about how to properly handle fish so they are left unharmed after being caught. Jeans offer tips like using barbless hooks and wetting your hands before handling the fish. Trout have a slimy film that protects them from disease; touching a trout with dry hands removes this film and exposes the trout to disease. Jeans also recommends not keeping the fish water for more than 30 seconds and not laying the trout on the ground to take pictures. Posting pictures on the Kern River Fishing Forum is fun to show others what your catch. However, one can be bombarded with angry responses if something in the picture shows the fish being mistreated in any way. The answers to the environmental questions that follow show just how important the topic of catch and release can be.

Shane Conrad’s response to the first question on subculture also applies to the question here on the environmental friendliness of the two groups.

You bring to mind a story that pretty much sums it up for me. Caught a stocker at the 'vous on the Lower. There were couple of guys spin fishing below me. They were nice enough guys until I threw that fish back. You would have thought I'd taken food off of a starving man's table (and trust me, these guys weren't starving). The guy kept alternating between the "incredulous salute" (turning his palms skyward, shrugging, looking me square in the eye and saying "Dude?") then turning and looking at his buddy, shaking his head, and saying ‘He just threw it back -- Can you believe it, he threw it back!’. I didn't want to be a further irritant, but it just kind of snuck out of my mouth when I said: ‘Sorry guys -- fly fishing here’. Still cracks me up thinking about it.

Shane’s experience is not a unique one; it is not uncommon for spin fishermen who do not practice catch and release to become upset with those that do. The frustration goes the other way as well many fly fishermen get very upset when they witness the trout they hold so dear being killed.

Sal Matia, the 44-year-old fly fisherman from Palmdale, California responded with a story as well.
I was catching and releasing some pretty nice bass at a local lake one spring time a few years ago. I finally had to move because the bait fishers were forming a lynch mob. I still laugh about the reaction when I put a 10-pounder back! I left and I politely suggested that the plug I was throwing was working really well.......AND that to live to be 10 lbs it had to survive 1 lb. These cats weren't starving either, if you know what I mean, but you would have thought I was stealing their lunch.

Rashad P. tells a similar story about how spin fishermen react to the releasing of fish.

Years ago I was in Michigan fishing for Steelhead there was quite a few people on the river and a few of them could not understand when I let a Steelhead go. One guy came by to let me know I could keep five fish. Later they were even more worked up when I let a second one go. They did not understand why I was not keeping the fish. Obviously I was the only one fly fishing there. I had a similar experience near Coos bay in Oregon 18 years ago. The other fisherman and the guide on the boat wanted to keep the Steelhead; once again I was the only one fly fishing.

The stories told by these fly fishermen are obviously not just unique to the Kern River, but they do show how different views on what should be done with the fish after catching them conflict. These stories also show that the spin fishermen talked about never even thinking about releasing the fish they catch. They act shocked at the idea that anyone would let a fish that could be eaten go. On the other end of the spectrum, the fly fishermen chalk it up to spin fishermen not realizing the impact they are having on the environment.

Catch and release issues have even cost people friendships, as can be seen in the answer given by Ryan McClain the 31-year-old fly fisherman from Glendale, California.

Some of my fly fishing 'friends' have become very good at catching trout on the fly. Much to my bewilderment, they catch and keep even more fish. Yes, sometimes more than their 'limit'. On the plus side, they typically fish planted waters and don't make the effort to find wild trout. I just don't understand. Some people, I guess, will never get it. Needless to say, we don't fish together anymore. That being said, I don't find this typical at all. Fly fishing has certainly raised my awareness of taking care of our resources, teaching my boys the importance of conservation, and just enjoying the experience.

---

6 10-pounder is referring to a fish that weighed ten pounds.
Ryan’s answer is the first we see that mentions fly fishermen not practicing catch and release. Ryan also does point out that it is not very typical for fly fishermen to not practice catch and release. The fact that the people Rick is referring to do not practice catch and release has ended their fishing relationship. As some of the previous answers have shown, Ryan points out once again that learning to fly fish has raised his awareness about taking care of the resources.

Ryan’s answer points out that some fly fishermen do keep the fish they catch and Dan Miller’s answer confirms that it does happen.

For me, it comes down to why people fish- to enjoy the outdoors, the beauty of God’s creation, getting away from it all, fishing with a rod and flies that I made (and sometimes catching) or, fishing for meat, filling the freezer, taking what one can cause ‘dammit, I spent $50+ on a license and I'm getting my money's worth’. Just my two cents. I have noticed that when spin fishing, the fish tend to be damaged a little more, with more of a chance of the hook getting set somewhere other than the mouth (eyes, gills, side of the head, stomach when they swallow the hook) rather than with fly fishing where the vast majority of the fish being hooked in the mouth with a smaller hook. Don't get me wrong, I like to keep an occasional fish but only what I would eat that night. Conservation needs to be forefront in every fisherman's mind, as the resource is really changing.

Dan admits to keeping an occasional fish here and there, but only if he is planning on eating it for dinner that night. Dan also believes that conservation of the resources needs to be at the forefront of every fisherman’s mind. One other good point that was touched on earlier is the fact that the equipment used by spin fishermen is much more likely to damage the fish than the equipment used by fly fishermen.

Tim Smith, the 48-year-old from Lemoore, California, believes age may have something to do with the reason fishermen become more environmentally sensitive.

I was a spin fisherman as a young man and numbers always were more important than the experience. When I started again in my late 50's it was as a fly fisherman and the experience was more important. Mainly, because I didn't catch a fish for the first two years I tried fly fishing and I am sure, because just being out there was enough. I joined
met some wonderful folks up here at the Kern River who mentored me and the rest is history.

Tim brings up a good point; age could have something to do with the way each individual looks at fishing. Tim’s answer clearly does not say that the different methods were the reason. Although, if you compare some of the previous answers to Tim’s one can easily make the connection that the chosen method has something to do with how Tim chooses to treat the River. First he points out that it took him two years to catch his first fish on a fly pole. This goes back to what Todd Lite said in his answer about how spin fishing’s entry level requirements are much easier to come by. Todd also points out that because of the difficulty of learning to fly fish a novice fly fisherman usually seeks advice from a guide or a media source and these sources usually teach about caring for the environment along with methods about how to catch fish. Plus, becoming a fly fisherman also entails learning about the interdependence of the prey which also leads to being more environmentally sensitive.
Conclusion

The trout fishery that is the Kern River has a rich and colorful history. The native trout in the Kern River and its tributaries have been there for thousands of years. Humans have also lived near the Kern River for quite some time. Starting with the Native Americans, to the gold miners, to the cattle ranchers, to the recreation seekers and residents today the Kern River has gone through many changes. Amongst the fishermen at the Kern River there are two distinct groups, the fly fishermen and the spin fishermen. With any two large groups of people there are going to some similarities and some differences.

Culture is a very slippery term. Scholars from different disciplines have long sought ways to distinguish what exactly the term culture means and how exactly to distinguish between two cultures. The study conducted here on the fly fishermen and the spin fishermen is an attempt to determine if there are two distinct cultures of fishermen existing on the Kern River. The reason the Kern River was specifically chosen is because of the unique geography of the Kern. The Kern River is the Southern Most River of the Sierra Nevada Mountain Range and it is also the Southern Most trout fishery that offers trout of 20 plus inches. The location of the Kern River ends up drawing fishermen from all over southern California in seek of catching the elusive Kern River rainbow trout. Amongst these fishermen there is not only two different techniques used to fish there are also two distinct cultures of fishermen.

In trying to distinguish between these two distinct cultures of fishermen the first step was to review the relevant literature on the subject. Defining the term culture was one important step in reviewing the literature. With an almost infinite number of choices
one definition of culture as well as one definition of subculture was chosen. First, the working definition of culture from the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies that is used by the great Peter Jackson in his book *Maps of Meaning* (1989) is, “the levels at which social groups develop distinct patterns of life” (Jackson 2). Second, the definition of a subculture found in the dictionary, “an ethnic, regional, economic, or social group exhibiting characteristic patterns of behavior sufficient to distinguish it from others within an embracing culture of society” (Merriam-webster.com). The topic has been elaborated on by geographers and others.

After defining what exactly culture is and all of the relevant literature the next step was to create a method of studying the fishermen of the Kern River. Three conversation starting questions were chosen to conduct semi-structured interviews. The question generally asked in order were, do you think there is a true subculture of fly fishermen on the Kern River and why or why not, followed by do you think there is more of a spiritual aspect to fly fishing than there is to spin fishing, and lastly do you think fly fishermen are more environmentally friendly than are spin fishermen. The responses given were quite interesting to say the least.

The overwhelming number of answers indicate that fly fishermen comprise a distinct subculture, although the reasons for this varied. Surprisingly, many of the answers given to this question overlapped with the two questions that were to follow. The Kern River fly fishing forum was cited by some as the reason they thought that there was a distinct subculture of fly fishermen on the Kern. Guy Jeans, who runs the fly shop in Kernville as well as the fishing forum, was also given credit to establishing the culture of fly fishing at the Kern. The answers that included the efforts of Guy jeans pointed out
the fact that he is always promoting proper etiquette on the river. Along the line of proper etiquette, others believed fly fishermen were a distinct subculture because of the respect they show to the environment and other fishermen. Others felt there was a true subculture of fly fishermen because to be a fly fishermen one must have a greater understanding of the workings of nature, thus giving them more of an appreciation for nature making the river a sacred place so to speak.

The second conversation starting question was whether or not there is more of a spiritual aspect to fly fishing than there is to spin fishing. The idea for this topic came originally from Norman Maclean’s famous book which is also now a movie called *A River Runs Through It*. From this novel comes the famous line “in our family there was no clear line between fly fishing and religion” (Maclean 1976, 1). This is such a relevant line because the father in the novel who said it was a Presbyterian Preacher and as the literature cited throughout this work tells us there are many references to fishing throughout the Bible. There are also rather recent scholarly studies done on the topic of “nature religions”.

The answers given to the spirituality question were quite interesting, the answers were more times than not a yes there is more of a spiritual aspect to fly fishing than there is to spin fishing. The reasons and the spirituality varied greatly from one answer to the next, some were even overwhelmingly religious. Many of the answers had to do with the fact that fly fishermen tend to appreciate nature and how nature is interconnected more than spin fishermen do. A fair amount of the answers also included how there is a peaceful, serene, or even sacred feel one gets while spending time out on the river fly
fishing. The strong emotional attachment fly fishermen have for the Kern River and all waters they fish lead to some very heated answers to the third question.

The third conversation starting topic was whether or not fly fishermen were more environmentally sensitive than spin fishermen. This question seemed to spark two main answers the first pertained to the amount of trash left along the river by spin fishermen. The second main answer dealt with the fact that fly fishermen were much more likely to practice catch and release. The overwhelming majority of answers to the question were yes, fly fishermen seem to be more environmentally friendly than do spin fishermen. Some answers offered the reason that becoming a fly fisherman is more difficult than it is to spin fish. Because of the difficulty of learning to fly fish most people seek advice from either the media in the form of a magazine or video and other seek advice from professional guides or shop owners like Guy Jeans. All of these sources looked to for help are very big into also teaching people to respect both the areas they fish and the fish themselves. Since spin fishing is rather easy to get into and easy to find some success many never seek this kind of advice and in turn never receive proper education on ways to protect the areas they fish and the fish themselves. In any case, all agreed that generally fly fishermen are much more environmentally friendly than are spin fishermen.

The results from the interviews discussed above point toward the fly fishermen of the Kern River being a distinct subculture. The majority of people interviewed answered yes to the first question which was whether or not they thought there was a distinct subculture. According to Peter Jackson cultures are made up of meanings and values that are made concrete through organized social events (Jackson 1989, 2). The fly fishermen of the Kern River are socially organized through the work of Guy Jeans and his online
fishing forum, as well as through organized events throughout the year. The answers as to why the people interviewed thought there was a distinct subculture of fly fishermen at the Kern river shows that fly fishermen exhibit characteristic patterns of behavior which are sufficient enough to distinguish fly fishermen from spin fishermen, according to the Webster dictionary this means they qualify as a subculture. This study also shows that similar to the bicycle courier subculture that Finchem describes fly fishermen at the Kern also find pleasure in being distinct from the main culture. Although, in the fly fishermen’s case this is because they feel as if they take better care of the Kern River and the wildlife both in and around it. This is not to say that the fly fishermen would not be happy if others like spin fishermen, campers, and rafter followed them and practiced catch and release and did not leave trash along the river.

The answers to the spirituality question tended to show that the fly fishermen of the Kern River have an intimate attachment to the river. In the words of Yi-Fu Tuan, Kern River fly fishermen know the Kern in an abstract way as one person knows another (Tuan 1975). Fly fishermen of the Kern River know how the river feels, smells, tastes, and how it looks at different times of the year. Spirituality and the divine exists as an entity above man and is not reducible to the actions by the individuals who are associated like Duncan says when describing “superorganic”. However, Duncan like Kroeber and Lowie who created the superorganic theory related it to culture. As was stated earlier the culture of fly fishermen at the Kern River would simply not exist if it were not for the individuals who uphold the values and pass them along to newcomers. So the superorganic theory does not apply to the fly fishing culture of the Kern River.
Don Mitchell argued that “the most important role for geographers is to try and explain the world around us” (Mitchell 1995, 580). Throughout this thesis it has been made clear that the term (sub) culture is very slippery and difficult to define, so like Mitchell recommended here the attempt has been to study the idea of fly fishermen being a distinct group rather than studying the term culture itself. In order to study and describe a group like the fly fishermen of the Kern River one must be able to use what Clifford Geertz calls a “thick description”. Geertz believes that any study of culture needs to be a semiotic one. The underlying meaning of facial expressions that Geertz describes parallels some of the underlying meanings of fly fishermen’s descriptions and actions. The interviews conducted for this thesis were far more successful because they were conducted by a fly fisherman as opposed to someone without any knowledge of fishing. As described in a few of the answers the fly fishermen of the Kern River can be a little standoffish, it takes time to be accepted into the group. It was also made clear that this study was not out in search of creating cultural law. Here like Geertz said “the study of culture is not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning” (Geertz 1973, 31). This study was meant to show what it means to be a fly fisherman on the Kern River and how that is clearly different than being a spin fisherman on the Kern River.

With any research project there are things that could have been done differently. Using semi-structured interviews had both pros and cons. The pros included the fact that each randomly chosen individual was able to give his or her own distinct answer. The main reason conversation starters were chosen instead of numbered questions was so the conversation could go in any direction it wanted. One problem some may feel with this
method is drawing quantitative conclusions is near impossible. This project was never intended to be quantitative, it was always meant to be qualitative. Culture studies are difficult no matter what but qualitative culture studies offer what Geertz refers to as “thick description”. Like Geertz it is believed here that cultural studies are intrinsically incomplete and in search of meaning not scientific law. The second unforeseen outcome was that some of the answers given to the questions overlapped with the questions to come. Now this can either mean that all three conversation starters were following the line of what exactly makes up the subculture of fly fishermen at the Kern, or it could mean that maybe some broader topics should have been chosen.

Further research can and should be done on the topic of the fishing cultures of the Kern and elsewhere. These groups of people are from a variety of backgrounds and are brought together by the wonderful sport of fishing. Research in this area would also continue to shed light on the ever present issue of the destruction of mother nature and her diminishing resources. Fly fishermen seem to be more than willing to do whatever it is they can in order to protect the areas and the fish they love so much. Fly fishermen seem to also be of the mindset that educating others about proper the ethics and etiquette of fishing will help stop some of the destruction of the environment and the fish. This research has also shown that there is reason to believe that the lack of knowledge may be one of the main reasons some people are not more mindful of the footprint they leave while fishing.
References


Appendix A

Lower Kern Area Recreation Opportunities

An excerpt from USDA Forest Service
Appendix B

Upper Kern Area Recreation Opportunities

An excerpt from USDA Forest Service